

**Cut Slope Composting:  
Field Trials and Evaluation**  
Kick Off Meeting via Conference Call  
Tuesday, October 21, 2008  
Minutes

Attending: Sue Sillick, Phil Johnson, Lisa Larsen, Patrick Plantenberg, Stuart Jennings, Pam Blicher and Rob Ament

Project Manager: Sue Sillick, MDT  
Principal Investigator: Rob Ament, WTI  
Technical Panel Chair: Phil Johnson, MDT

Technical Panel Members:

Boggs, Sandra  
Burkhardt, Bob  
Christensen, Kris  
James, Carl  
Johnson, Phil  
Kaufman, Gene  
Larsen, Lisa  
Plantenberg, Patrick  
Pokorny, Monica  
Sillick, Sue

Technical subcontractors: Stuart Jennings and Pam Blicher, Reclamation Research Group (RRG)

Compost applications subcontractor: Quality Landscape Seeding (Quality)

Item 1- Process: Sue S. introduced the project and how it progressed to this point and discussed where we go from here. She indicated that Phil J. submitted a research problem statement. A scope of work (SOW) was developed and an RFP was issued. No proposals resulted from the RFP. In the meantime, WTI expressed an interest in the project. Sue approached WTI about working with RRG to conduct the research. WTI submitted a proposal and it was approved last week by the MDT Research Review Committee (RRC). She indicated the purpose of this kick-off meeting was to make sure we were all on the same page and ready to proceed with research.

Sue stressed that this technical panel is the key to project success. First, the panel developed a SOW and RFP that accurately reflected the desired project. Second, the panel needed to make sure the proposal accurately reflected the SOW, as the proposal is a part of the contract. Now that the project is active, the panel needs to review all products carefully to make sure they are getting what they want. Sue stated that project progress

reports should be detailed enough that they could essentially be combined to form a final report. That way there should be no surprises when the draft final report is delivered.

Sue also stated it is her job, as project manager, to facilitate the panel getting what it wants out of the project and to act as a liaison between the panel and researchers. All decisions are made by the entire technical panel when meeting as a panel or through Sue via e-mail.

Sue stressed the importance of communication.

Item 2: Sue S. reviewed the contract and stressed that Rob should familiarize himself with the contractual requirements. Technical discussions are permitted as necessary between any panel member and the consultants. However, any decisions affecting scope, time, and budget must be approved by the entire panel and must go through Sue. Any proposed change in key project personnel must be approved by MDT prior to any changes being made. Also, any other contractual changes, including changes in budget category amounts need to be made prior to any changes being made. No data may be released while the project is active unless prior approval is obtained. The contract is a cost-reimbursement, not-to-exceed the contract amount. MDT withholds the last 15% until all products are accepted by MDT. The deliverables are outlined in the proposal and are considered draft until MDT accepts them. They should be the contractor's vision of the final polished products. The contract describes the roles of the individuals as noted above. WTI is contractually responsible for project, not RRG.

Item 3: Good communications are necessary for a successful project. Communications concerning the deliverables will be routed from Rob A. to Sue S. Sue S. will distribute to the technical panel. Issues on technical matters will be sent from Rob A. to Phil J. and Sue. Phil and Sue will send to the technical panel as appropriate. Stuart J. and Phil J. will communicate directly on smaller matters regarding details of implementing the project.

Item 4: The frequency of conference calls was discussed. It was decided that a conference call will occur after the following two deliverables are received by MDT:

- a. Test plot construction report
- b. 2009 field season report

Item 5: Stuart J. gave a short history of the Phase I study and how it shaped the objectives in the current project.

Item 6: Stuart J. gave an overview of the proposed experimental design (see Table 1.) which led to further refinements and a series of discussions regarding the various treatments (see items 7-10).

Item 7: A discussion of whether to retain the treatment using netting was pursued. It was resolved that it was worthwhile to include in the plot design given it may prove to be a cost-effective stabilization method. Therefore, the report on this treatment will detail

costs and the ease (or difficulty) with which netting can be applied over the compost blanket.

Item 8: Due to the technical difficulties with applying gravel as a compost retention technique, this treatment was dropped from Table 1. In its place a second tackifier will be added to the treatment design. There are a wide variety of tackifiers, so Stuart J., Phil J. and Quality will discuss and then decide on which 2 tackifiers to use in the field tests that will most useful for MDT.

Item 9: A broad discussion of compost ensued as a result of its variety, quality, and the various quantities (application rates) that were described in Table 1. It was resolved that the specifications Phil J. has developed for MDT reclamation projects for wood compost and microblend compost will be used for application at the project site. This will ensure quality control and narrow the selection to two varieties of compost. It was noted that the chemistry/composition of these two composts should be described in the report.

Item 10. Application rates for the compost blankets in Table 1 are 1/8, 1/4, and 1/2 inch in depth. It was decided that it was more useful to use volume than weight or thickness. Phil J. remarked that 3 Tons/Acre was roughly equal to the 1/8 inch depth. So Quality will be applying compost blankets on the plots using 3, 6, or 9 Tons/Acre rates, which will be reported as volume as appropriate.

Item 11. It was decided that there would be minimal seed bed preparation for the project. The cut slope construction ended five years ago, but Stuart J. and Pam B. went to the site on Friday, October 17<sup>th</sup> to review its condition. After some discussion, the following seed bed preparation will occur by MDT and others at the site on the first day, as Quality sets up their equipment:

- a. Hand raking of the few deep rills that occur within the plots will be done, as needed, to assure the compost blanket is not suspended in the air across the rill.
- b. Phil J. will measure and describe the ~1% coverage of plants currently on the site
- c. All mature spotted knapweed plants will be pulled. Any cheat grass on the site will be left alone.

Item 12: Phil J. will develop a seed mix using native species appropriate for the site. The site is glacial till primarily composed of fine sands and silts, with little clay. Species for the drier, harsher, south-facing slope will be preferred.

Item 13: The application of ground juniper as a vegetative cover was removed from the project.

Item 14: Safety issues were discussed. The ditch below the slope will leave adequate space for field work to occur off the road surface. However, Phil J. will contact the local MDT office to assure that signs will be placed on both sides of project to warn oncoming traffic.

Item 15: BMPs were discussed. Although the reestablishment of plants is a BMP, there was concern that the public may perceive the work to be adding sediment to the ditch

below the cut slopes. It was resolved that Phil J. would locate some straw logs and place them on the down slope end of the project in the ditches on both sides of the road.

**ACTION ITEMS:**

1. Rob A. will pursue expediting the MDT contract with the MSU Office of Sponsored Programs and get the subcontract with RRG in place at the same time. RRG will then be able to finalize a contract with Quality, pointing out the changes to the plot construction that were decided at this meeting (no gravel application, an additional tackifier application).
2. The selection of the two tackifiers will occur between Stuart J., Phil J., and Quality
3. Phil J. will make the final decision on the seeding mixture and give information to WTI so it is in the report.
4. Rob A. will notify the Technical Panel when the work dates are finalized with Quality.
5. MDT, WTI, RRG, and others at the work site will pull weeds and hand rake rills as needed on the first day.
6. Phil J. will inventory plant coverage.
7. Phil J. will communicate safety needs so signs are placed by MDT for the week of plot construction.
8. Phil J. will bring and place straw logs in the ditches at the work site.
9. Rob A. will take Patrick P.'s edits for the Revised Proposal and incorporate the changes from the kickoff meeting into a Revised Proposal, version 2.